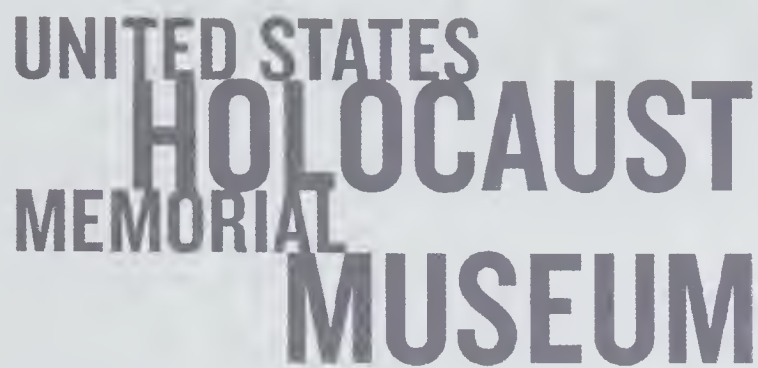




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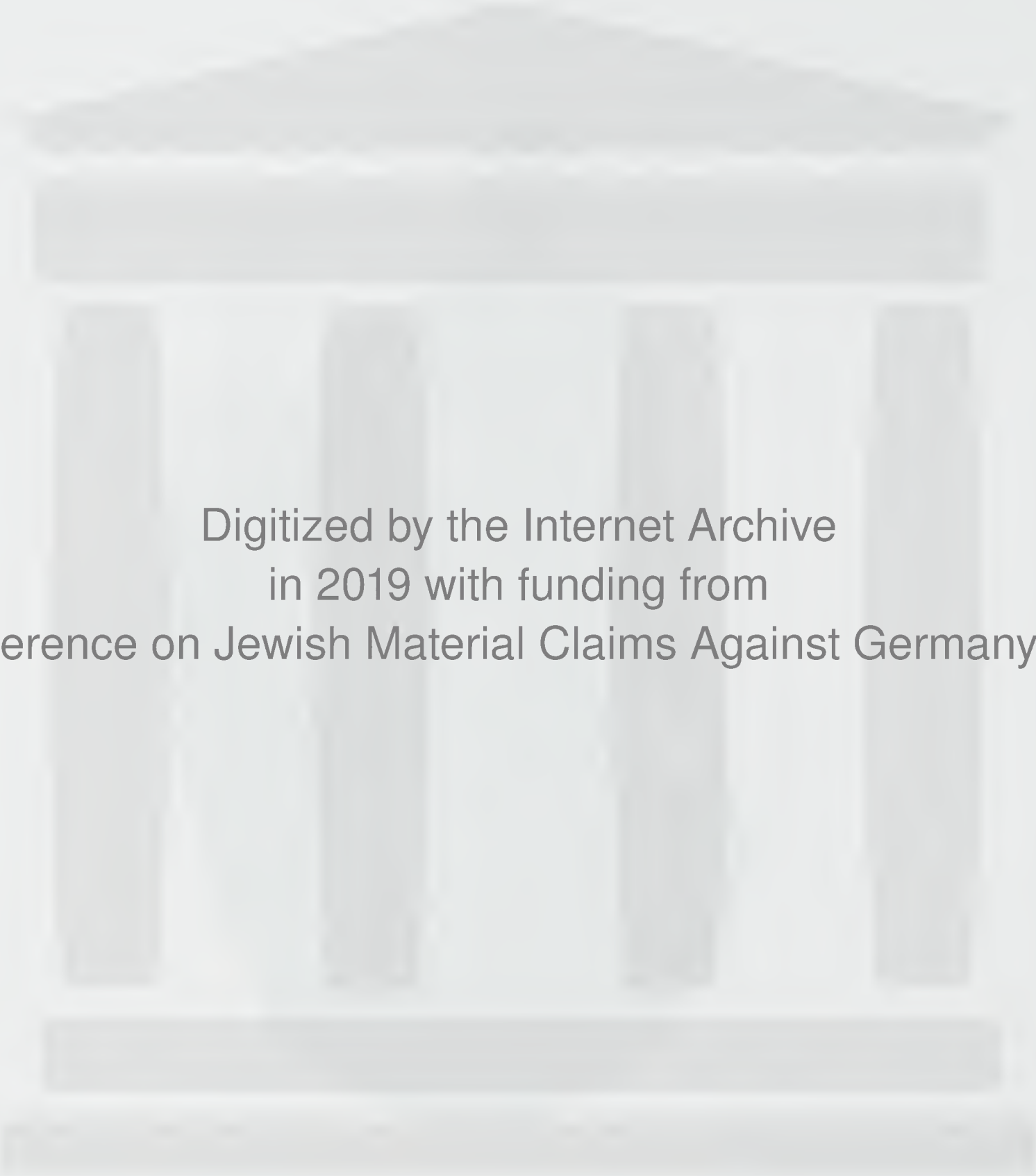
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The Diary of a Survivor



by Herbert R. Ert



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THE DIARY OF A SURVIVOR

by Henbert R. Ent

*with collaboration by
Lone Ent and Eileen Ent*

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The Diary of a Survivor

by Herbert R. Ert

Philadelphia, Pa. 1992

This is not a work of fiction. Samson Reichstein, my father, was not just a survivor of the holocaust, but a survivor in the truest sense of the word who survived life in a Ghetto, a concentration camp and made good his escape by posing as a German. I was fortunate to be able to bring him over to this country in 1946. He had been through a lot and felt that his experiences should remain on record for the world to see the results of bigotry, racial hatred and persecution. He wanted the world to remember that the animosity of one person toward another because they are created different, is morally wrong and that the zealous pursuit of an ideology regardless of consequences is criminal.

What happened in Europe during the '30s, was not just criminal, it was insanity brought on by mass hysteria in the name of an ideology, exploited by a group of moral cripples to further their own selfish ends.

Papa started writing his story in 1946 aboard ship on his way from Hamburg to New York. He continued when he lived with us in Philadelphia. When I came home at night, my wife told me that whenever he worked on his memoirs, he started to cry. I am no psychiatrist and don't know if I did the right thing, but I took his papers away from him and convinced him to stop the project.

I locked the papers away and did not look at them until now, when my daughter Eileen started questioning me about my fathers experiences. His written story ends just before the German army started retreating. I hope that I remember enough of his tales to finish it for him.

The diary was written in German on scraps of paper. Most of it readable though it was a major effort to sort them into the right sequence. The translation is as accurate as it could be made except for the liberties I took in tailoring individual phrases to the demands of the English language, and in trying to interpret several illegible words. In retelling some of the incidents and in describing the German hierarchy, my memory had to rely on events that happened over half a century ago. But, worst of all -- it is all fact, not fiction.

I also noticed several inconsistencies in his notes, mostly pertaining to dates and town names. He never had a chance to edit his diary and any changes on my part would have been speculative. I left most of them unchanged.

It's not a happy story. If you feel that the violence is more than you can take, don't read it. This was my reason for filing it away for 45 years.

Herbert Ert

Chapter 1

Herbert -- March 1946

It was a busy morning at the gas station. One of my helpers didn't show up and customers were piling in for service work. "Herb," Joe yelled over, "telephone - war department!" Joe had recently been discharged from the army and this was his way of telling me that my wife Lore was on the phone. She normally didn't call me at work, so something was wrong.

"I have some good news for you," she said, "brace yourself -- your father has been found! But I also have to tell you that your mother has lost her life."

I was numb. My parents and I saw each other last in October '38 when I had left Europe to emigrate to the United States. They had got caught in that morass of Poland that kept changing hands between Russia and Germany during World War 2. This was March '46 and the war had ended in Europe on May 5 of the previous year. After all the news reports, we had given up hope years before and in my mind I never expected to see either of them again.

The call had come from the HIAS, a Jewish charitable organization that was actively involved in relocating displaced Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

The facts were simple. He had worked his way over to the American Zone of occupation. He was in a camp for displaced persons and would I please send \$132 to pay for the ships passage here. It put a dent into our meager savings but a week later, the check was in the mail. About three months from that date, we were advised that he would dock in New York City within three days.

Chapter 2

Sam -- 1884 - 1920

Samson Reichstein was born on March 24. 1884 in Tarnopol, a small rural town in the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire. His father, Joseph Reichstein was a bookkeeper in the town's brewery, a position as high as a Jew could hope to achieve in that industry. He had a son by his first wife and when she died, he married a much younger woman, Dora, who bore him five children. My father was the oldest child by that marriage. His mother had worked as a maid in the local castle and like her husband, had received an education and could read and write, from what I understand, not a common occurrence in that area in those days.

When Sam was thirteen, his father passed away, leaving behind a young wife with five children and no support. How she survived, I don't know, but my father was shipped to Vienna and became an apprentice to a "Metaldrucker." This trade consisted of pressing sheet metal into various shapes for decorative purposes. An art that soon gave way to the industrial revolution.

Shortly after he received his journeyman's papers, my father realized that his trade held no future for him and he went to work as an inside salesman in a publishing house. As soon as he had saved enough money, he sent for his mother, his two brothers, Emil and Marcus, and his two sisters, Klara and Fanny, to move to Vienna.

As their sole support, he looked for a way to improve their lot and found that as an outside salesman for his company, he could increase his income

considerably. He was offered the opportunity to work as a franchised dealer in an assigned territory that included Northern Italy and the French Riviera. I don't believe that at the time Papa spoke either French or Italian, but by the time I knew him, he spoke six or seven languages, most of them fluently, a talent that years later was to save his life. Either way, he accepted the challenge and, from his report made a lot of money, all the time sending his support payments to the family in Vienna.

He lived in Italy, mostly in Milano for seven years. When World War 1 erupted in 1914, he thought it judicious as an Austrian citizen to leave Italy. Before he had left Vienna, he had been rejected for physical reasons for military service. Since he had no desire to be drafted into a wartime Austrian Army, he moved to Hamburg, Germany. Even though Germany had entered the war on Austria's side, nobody seemed to care about his service eligibility.

In Hamburg, he opened a produce business and that is where he met my mother Kathe Ert. Possibly, their first meeting was arranged by my mothers family. She was the fifth of nine children of a family that originated in Holland.

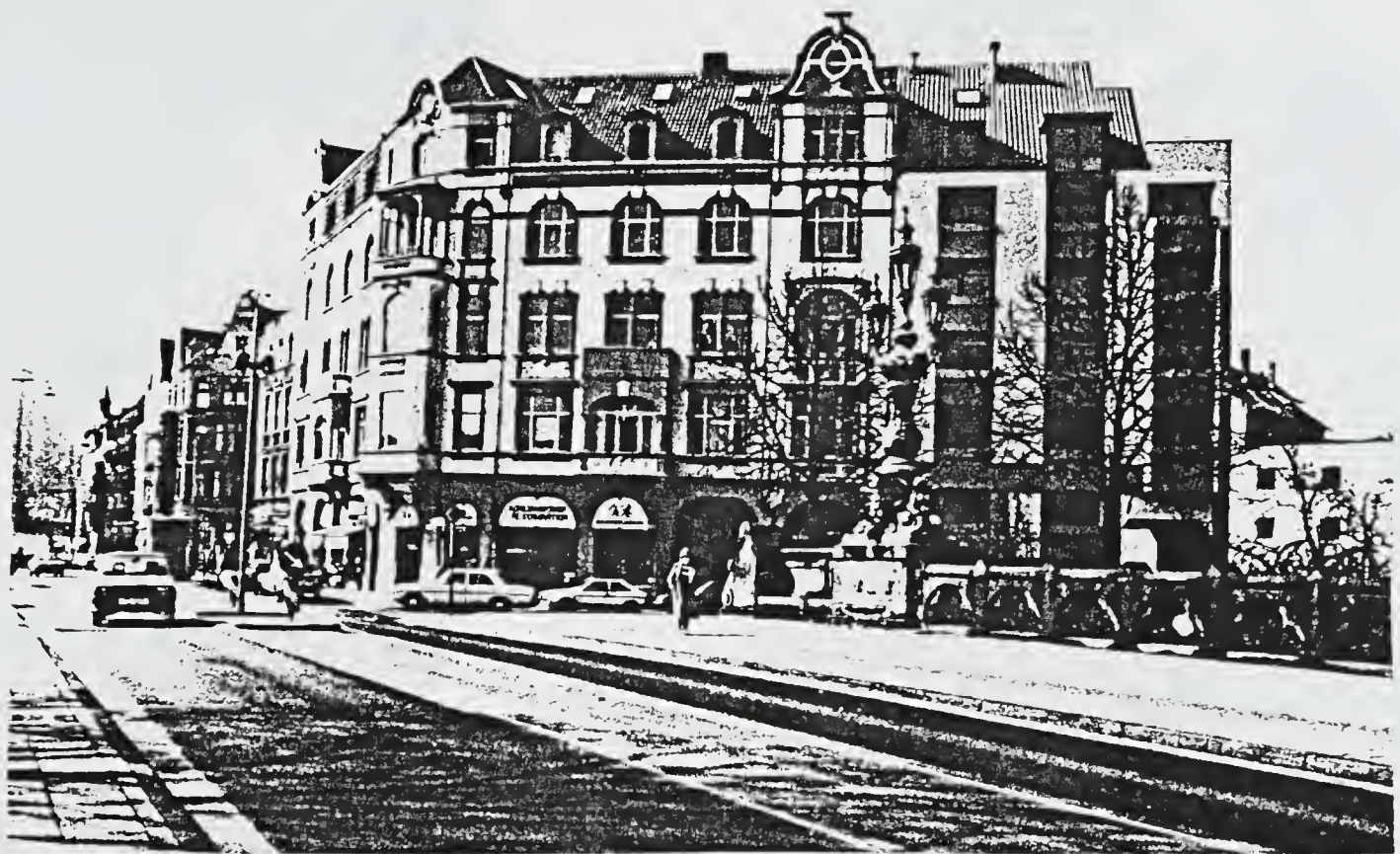
Her father owned a bakery in Hanover, Germany and from there, his headquarters, he traveled the country fair circuit, selling cakes and pastry. In Hanover during the annual rifle association festival, he operated a huge tent-restaurant. While the rest of the children left home, Mama stayed behind to nurse her ailing father until his death in 1917.

By that time, Mama had finally time to think of herself. I guess, Papa was also tired of being lonely and ready to settle down. They were married on October 13. 1918. Even though the marriage may have been arranged, they were deeply in love.

Sam gave up his business in Hamburg and moved to Hanover where Kathe had taken over the large 9-room apartment at Koenigsworther Strasse 11 after her father's death. The war ended in November 1918. Germany had lost the conflict and

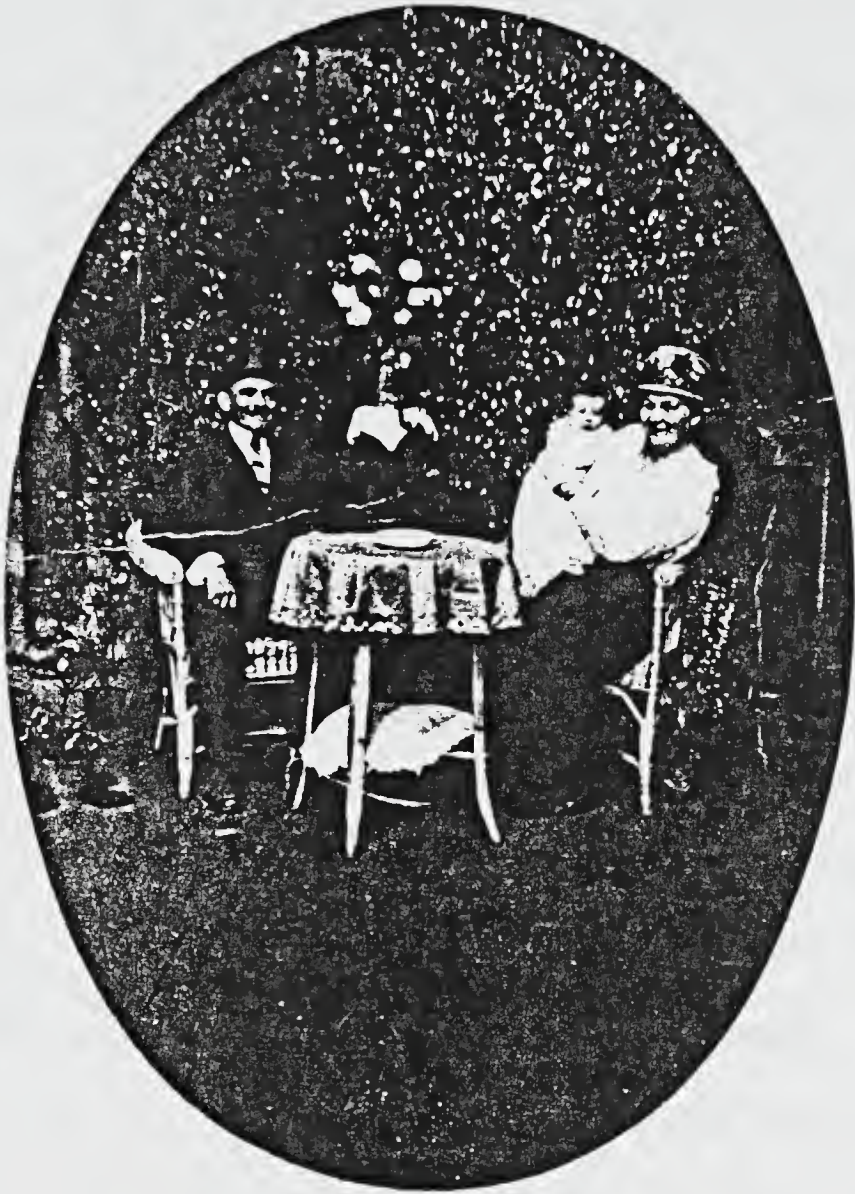
the population was facing a difficult time. Inflation started and anyone who still had any savings left, soon found them devalued.

The political situation stabilized and Poland had been recreated from the remains of three major powers, Austria, Germany and Russia. The town of Tarnopol became a Polish city. Papa had to decide if he wanted to be without affiliation to any country or to take out Polish citizenship. He decided on the latter and because of that Mama and I also became Polish citizens.



The apartment house
at Koenigswortherstrasse 11 where the
Reichstein family lived in the 2nd
floor apartment with the open balcony

The Reichstein family during happier days



1920



1922



1928

Chapter 3

Herbert -- 1920 - 1938

I was born on March 8. 1920 and named Herbert Reichstein. I did not change my last name to Ert until I came to Philadelphia and found that my name was hard to pronounce for the English tongue and even harder to spell.

I remember my father as a middle-aged, portly man with thinning hair that he tried to hide by combing it the wrong way. Quiet and respectful, I often heard him called "a real gentleman," that's more than I can say for his son. Papa was perfectly content to let Mama be the authoritarian figure in bringing me up.

As a traveling salesman, he was away from home often from Monday to Friday, In my early years he was a rather remote figure to me whom Mama had to build up in my mind so I would know that we were all one family. He made an effort to establish a rapport with me but he is not the only parent who never fully succeeded.

The only time I remember Papa ever to lay a hand on me was when I was about 5 years old. We lived in a huge 5-story house. One day, the painters came to erect scaffolding. To a five year old, this was quite an event. While I was playing on our balcony, I climbed over the edge and onto the wooden planks. Naturally, within minutes I was caught by Mama, who thought it was time that Papa asserted his authority. He sure did. After all these years, I still remember that you are not allowed to climb on scaffolding.

Papa, who had been a salesman most of his life took to the road. He traveled the rural districts, selling industrial greases to farmers. He even went into

business for himself in that line, but in the early thirties, the first vestiges of anti-semitism made themselves felt. He went into bankruptcy. Actually, I don't believe that he ever was financially successful after he got married.

There always was some anti-semitism in Germany, the same as there is racial prejudice all over the world wherever two different human species have to live side by side. During the years after World War 1, the Jewish community had pretty much integrated itself into the German society and was accepted by a great majority of the population as being equal.

My first experience telling me that I was different from the other children came during my first week in school. The teacher called three of the 30-plus children to stand up and then advised us that because of our beliefs, we were excused from their religious lessons. This of course created curiosity among the other children who never had heard of a Jew before. One of them asked me if that was better than being Christian and I told him that I did not know. I asked my mother and, naturally, she told me, Jewish. However, the other boy had also asked his mother and our answers did not agree. Thus started my first religious confrontation.

I soon learned that when you belong to a minority, it is sometimes expedient to keep your mouth shut. I was pretty well accepted by my classmates right through my four years of high school

One of my gym teachers in school was Herman Paseman. He had made a name for himself as the German high jumping champion, a title he held for over 25 years. His son Heinz was a class mate of mine. Once he approached me to confide that he has been absent from school last week because his father had him and his younger brother circumcised to prevent disease in later years. His father had mentioned to him that this was customary among Jews. Since I was the only Jew he knew, he apparently felt that we had something in common. We compared more than just notes.

We remained friendly for the next two years but then, one day he came to me.

His father had instructed him to tell me that he could no longer play with me. He was told to apologize but that in his father's position as government employee they just could not take the chance of being too friendly with Jews. At least they had the decency to explain.

By 1934, the Nazis had discovered a new "science," -- Rassenkunde. This was supposedly a scientific study of the inherent difference of the races. With help of charts and drawings of facial characteristics, teachers had to explain the superiority of the Arian race. The English, Irish, Germans and several other Nordic nationalities were definitely Arians. The natives of India showed enough European characteristics to be considered "honorary" Arians. Negroes were an inferior race but Jews and other Semitic races were definitely at the bottom of the barrel. Italians and other Mediterraneans were a fringe category.

My wife Lore whose family has been Jewish as far back as they can remember, told me an interesting anecdote. During Rassenkunde she was called to the front of her class by her teacher so that he could point to this blond, blue-eyed child to demonstrate what a true German should look like.

During my second year in high school, I was then twelve and larger than most of the boys in my class, there was a school outing. The classes were to assemble at school and march behind their class flag to the Eilenriede, Hanover's city park. The boy who was assigned to carry the flag, got tired and asked me to take over. Most of the parents walked on the sidewalk along with their children, my parents included and I could see that Papa was as proud as could be. Then I heard a boy to my rear question the fact that a Jew should be allowed to carry the class flag. I acted like I didn't hear him but a few minutes later, I pretended tiredness and asked another boy to take over.

These were among the first signs of active anti-semitism. From then on, the newspapers continued to bring more and more frequent reports of friction. Hitler came to power in 1933. After his bankruptcy, Papa had taken over a line of

clothing that was sold to government officials. He had a fairly good income but when the Nazis took over, he was finished with that kind of work. He took a job as a salesman for a local Jewish printing and office supply firm that he held until their deportation.

I was a typical teenager, rebellious and hard to handle. Mark Twain phrased it properly when he said, "When I was fourteen, I knew that my father was the most stupid man in the world. By the time I turned 21, I was surprised how much he had learned in the last seven years." By the time I was 21, I was living in Philadelphia and my father was struggling for his life in a Ghetto.

During those years, I met one person who later on created international interest and who also originated from Hanover. The Jewish congregation in Hanover operated a Hebrew school where we received religious instructions and then were prepared for our Bar Mitzvah. One day, the principal walked in with two boys, one about our age of seven, the other one about five. He and the teacher discussed the admission of one of them to our class. It turned out they were talking about the five year old. However, even he was much too advanced for our limited knowledge. Apparently he belonged to an orthodox, very pious family. His name was Hershel Gruenspan. (German spelling). This is the youth who blew his cool when his parents were deported. Living in Paris at the time, he picked up a gun, went to the German embassy and killed one of their employees. Though the following atrocities had already been planned, this was the spark that set off Kristal Nacht, the night when all Jewish stores were vandalized across Germany, Jewish men were imprisoned and their wives and children terrorized.

Because of the political situation, it was decided that it was useless for me to continue school. So, at age 14, I was apprenticed to a Jewish interior decorator and upholsterer. During the second year into my four-year apprenticeship, my boss had the opportunity to emigrate to Italy with his family, leaving me without a job. My father, who was traveling the streets of Hanover anyway, went from shop to shop, looking for a master who would be willing to accept me. He found a Catholic upholsterer who agreed to take me in if his men would not object. I stayed there until I emigrated, long enough to get my journeyman's papers. I did have problems with one journeyman but it never got to the boss' ears.

Catholics were also in a precarious situation. The Nazi hierarchy did not oppose them as individuals but felt that the influence from Rome might get into the way of their own teachings and they set out to discredit the Catholic church. Priests were pulled in and accused of homosexuality, a ploy that had worked for Hitler once before. In 1933, he had to fight a revolt inside his own ranks. A man by the name of Roehm, his chief of staff in command of the SA, a group of uniformed bullies, led the dissension. Hitler capitalized on the fact that when Roehm was arrested, they found him in a homosexual embrace with one of his subordinates. He never made it out of his bedroom alive.

For us the handwriting was on the wall. It was decided that I should emigrate to America. After I had found work, my parents had intended to follow and together we would build a new future. The American consulate was overrun by other Jews with the same ideas and waiting lists for visas were long -- many years into the future.

For once, our Polish citizenship paid off. I had never been to Poland nor did I speak the language but received a visa on the Polish quota.

The night before I was to leave for Hamburg, Papa came into my room. I suppose, Mama had nagged him that it was time to tell his son the facts of life.

I was 18 years old and somewhere along the way, had learned that there was a difference between the male and female of our species. A small but welcome difference. Besides, working with a group of studs whose only topic of conversation was bragging about their sexual prowess and their success with the opposite sex, there was really very little that Papa could contribute to my knowledge.

I told Papa that I knew "all about it." He was more embarrassed than I was and also relieved that he did not have to go through with his effort. So he just warned me that there are many "bad" women in the world who could easily infect me with an unmentionable sickness. Then he sat next to my bed and started crying.

The following day, Mama and I took the train to Hamburg, where she saw me off on the SS. St. Louis for my trip across the ocean.

Chapter 4

Papa's Diary -- 1938 - 46

by Samson Reichstein

Translated by Herbert Reichstein Ert

Aboard Ship, June 19. 1946

It was 7:30 on a dusky morning on October 28, 1938 when the door bell rang. My wife Kathe, answered it. A policeman and a Gestapo officer walked into the apartment. In a commanding voice, the Gestapo agent asked her if she was Frau Reichstein. After my wife confirmed that she was, he ordered her to get dressed within five minutes and to take some bread with her since she would be away for a while.

(The Gestapo or Geheime Staats Polizei was the secret police controlled by the Nazi Party. The SS or Schutz Staffel was formed as the armed goon squad for the party. During the war, they became the politically motivated elite armed forces units)

I happened to be getting dressed at the time, so I could not hear what went on in the front hall of our large apartment. When I approached the officers to question them, I was also ordered to be ready in five minutes. This scene was played off so rapidly and came as such a surprise that my wife left our home in her slippers. We never saw our apartment again.

First we stopped at a private residence, Koenigsworther Strasse 5. While the Gestapo went up the steps to arrest someone else, the policeman stayed with

us downstairs in the entrance hall. He produced a document from his pocket and asked Kathe to sign it. Then I had to sign a similar document. They were our deportation orders.

Next, we were taken to the police precinct at Koenigsworther Platz and from there to the Concert Hall at Am Hohenufer. There were about 1,000 Jews (Polish citizens), all residents of Hanover. At noon, members of the German Jewish congregation brought us some food, a little money and a few pieces of clothing.

Between 5 and 6 p.m., we were loaded into automobiles and driven to the railroad station. The streets were lined with the good citizens of Hanover who hurled every possible insult at us. At Raschplatz, the railroad square, we were made to pass through a police cordon like common criminals.

The train was there waiting for us, ready to transport us on our trip into an uncertain future. Several members of the Polish Jewish congregation, including some people we knew, Mrs. Abrahamson and her sister Britta, had also been taken there.

At 10:40 p.m the train departed -- heading east. While on the train we received several liverwurst sandwiches and a container with drinking water. The next morning at 5, the train arrived at the Polish border. We were only allowed to keep 10 Marks. The rest of our money was confiscated. A guard advised us that the women would be transported by car but the men would have to walk.

Kathe entered the car and took one suitcase along. I took the other suitcase with me. We were led into a forrest. Suddenly, without warning, we were attacked by the SS men who were guarding us. They kicked and beat us while our suitcases were ripped out of our hands and thrown into a ditch. Even the sick, the weak and infirm were all beaten and kicked. We never expected to reach the border, about 3 miles away and were terrified. Finally, soaked in perspiration from fear and from the great physical strain, we did reach the border.

About ten policemen with guns drawn lined both sides of the road. One of

them called over to us, "Anyone returning will be shot!" We walked another few hundred yards when we were stopped by (Polish) border guards who told us not to advance any further. Later, they changed their minds, however, and let us continue.

Chapter 5

Kathe and I were reunited at the border. She seemed more composed than before and felt somewhat better. That is how we arrived at a camp the Poles had put up for the arriving exiles in a hurry near Zbaszyn, a town of about 5,000 inhabitants. We slept in a stable on straw. Later on, we were fed some awful food. A lot of people had to share the limited space.

We stayed in camp until early November. This was when Kathe came down with a bad cold and I realized that I had to find a heated place in which to live. She did receive medical attention and fortunately recuperated.

Slowly, winter came to an end, spring arrived, then summer. Kathe's health improved and so we lived on to whatever the future might hold in store for us. On June 20, 1939, we were registered and questioned as to where we wanted to reside. I requested Tarnopol, a city of 36,000 about 25 miles from the Romanian border. It was the town where I was born and I still had relatives living there.

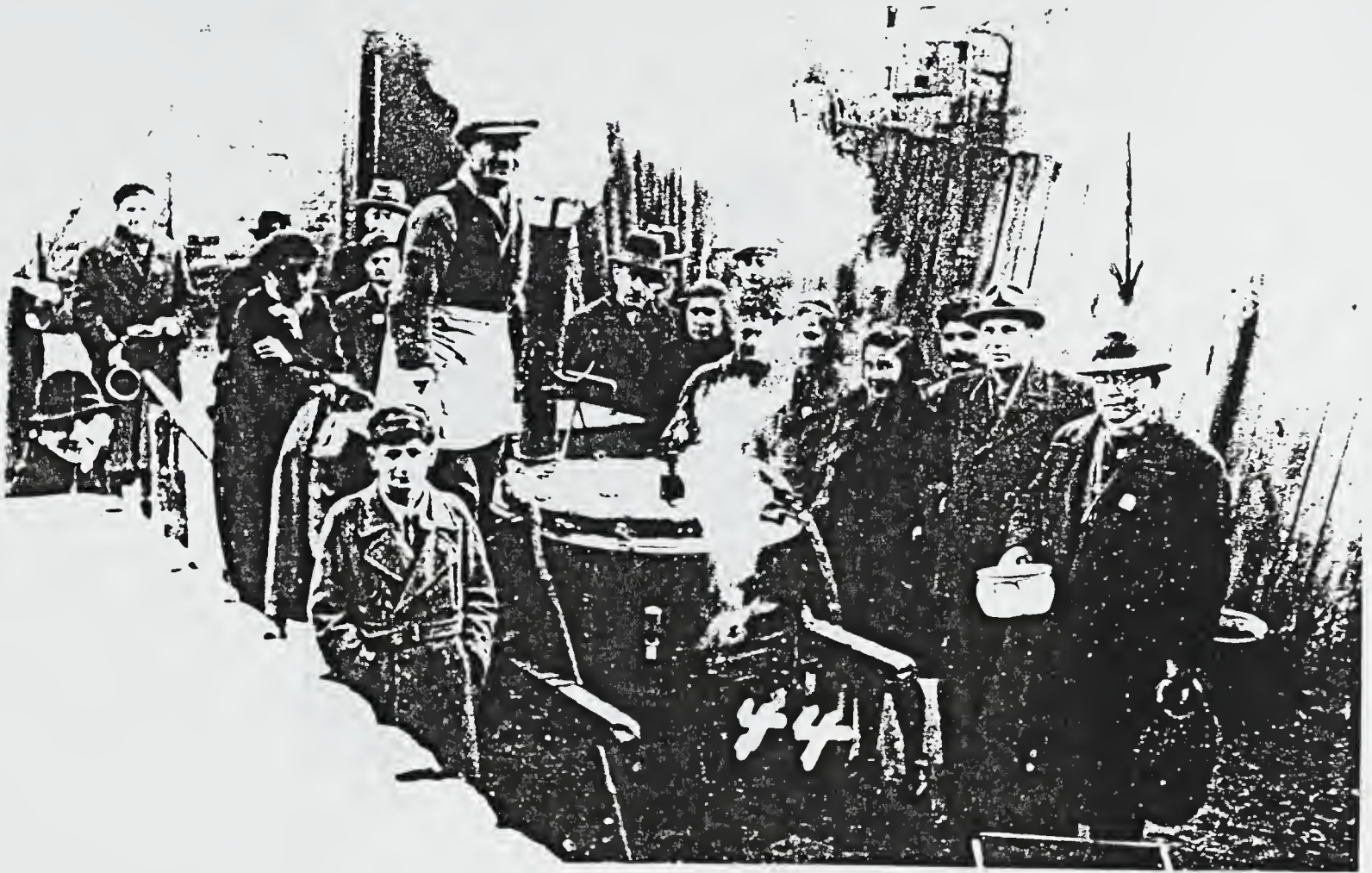
(Tarnopol now Ternopol was part of the old Austrian-Hungarian empire. It was turned over to the newly formed Poland in 1919 and was ceded to the USSR in 1945. It is now part of the Ukraine)

Once in Tarnopol we were happy to have found a small place of our own. We hoped for the political situation to settle down so that we could emigrate to America to be with our son.

The war between Poland and Germany started on Sept 1, 1939. We could hear artillery fire coming closer day by day. The German air force bombed the city. On Sept. 17, a radio announcement advised us that at 5 in the afternoon, the Russian forces would occupy Tarnopol. And so it happened. At the announced time, the first tanks rolled into town. We were happy!

Our good fortune didn't last very long. About 8 p.m, artillery fire began

Sam, standing in line at the soup kitchen in the
refugee camp in Zbaszyn, Poland, 1939



In camp, Zbaszyn, Poland 1938 - 1939



Involuntary winter vacation
left to right: Kathe, Sam and a friend



June 7. 1939. Kathe's 57th birthday party
Kathe is in front holding baby. Sam is to
her right in last row

again.. The Poles had attacked the Russians. There were dead and wounded on both sides. The Jesuit church and convent were burned down. My wife became extremely scared and agitated. I had to stay by her side the whole time. The shooting lasted about an hour before it quieted down. The next morning it started again and lasted about an hour. They repeated the same again that evening for an additional hour.

The activists (local civilians) were locked up, shipped to Russia and life started to go back to normal. The Russians had the stores reopened -- of course, by Russian rules. I was only able to obtain a job for a small salary of 300 Rubels a month since I had not yet mastered the Russian language. I was content being a storeroom clerk in a book store. With a minimum of life's necessities, my wife and I were able to eke out a living. My employment lasted from December 1939 to June 31. 1941, when the Russian army began to withdraw. It was then that our manager dissolved the business and returned to Russia.



Dinner in UNRRA camp Lambertheim
Sam is first on left

Identity Card No. 637
 Name: Reichstein Samson
 Index card No. 405776193
 Born 24.3.1884. Tarnopol Poland
 Profession: Tradesman
 Address: Ludwigstrasse 30
 Nationality Stateless

D. P. C.
 (16) Lam
 U.S. Milit.
 of G



Samson Reichstein
 (Own hand signature)

has been until his liberation by the U.S. Army
 imprisoned under the Nazi-rule, as political
 prisoner in the following concentration camps

and has the K. Z.-Prisoner number: 1

Lampertheim, the 15.5.1946.

Director of U.N.R.R.A. Registration Office:
 Team 521:

M. Oztedel

Remarks:

Sam's identity card issued by UNNRA

Chapter 6

The Germans pursued the Russians with energy and Tarnopol suffered heavy bomb damage. We hid in the cellar until the Germans bypassed the town on July 2. At 3 in the afternoon, we could already see the SS in cars and on motorcycles chase around town. On July 3, all stores were plundered by the Ukrainians with help of the SS.

At 9 a.m. on July 4, my wife rushed home from a visit with our relatives to warn me that all Jewish men were being pulled from their homes. I attempted to get dressed in a hurry when suddenly I heard heavy foot steps in front of my door. There were three SS men. The leader had a revolver and the other two carried heavy knives. They demanded to know, "Are there any Jews here?" My wife admitted to that fact. One of the men yelled, "All Jewish men outside," and one of them kicked me in the back.

Outside it was raining and I only wore a shirt, no jacket. Because of the excitement, I didn't feel anything. While they were still rounding up Jews, I ran into the fields and hid in the corn. Hours later the cold started getting through to me so I finally tried to return to the house to get myself a jacket, a raincoat and some bread. After considerable danger, I made it home, got what I needed and then I went back into hiding again. On that day, about 4,000 Jews were shot in Tarnopol.

When I came home the next morning at 6, my wife cried with joy since she was told that I had been shot. Then she suggested that I should join neighbors in our building as they went to work in the morning. Many of them were employed in the electric plant. So, at 6:30, I picked up a shovel and went to work. I had to cart away the debris which was left over when the plant was destroyed by the

German airplanes. At quitting time, I joined my group to walk home, but shortly before we arrived there, one of the other workers and I were stopped by two Ukrainians and marched off to jail. On the way, they beat us without mercy.

In the prison yard, I was forced to empty my pockets. Waiting there were about another 180 Jews and I got into line with them. What I saw was the most terrible sight I have ever been a witness to: Mountains of Jewish corpses were piled up, courtesy of the German SS. At 9 that evening, we were taken from the prison and brought to a square. All night we were forced to stand at attention. Several people were thrown into a well. At midnight, I begged an SS man for permission to sit down and in answer received his gun butt into my belly. At 6 in the morning we were chased into jail. Before we entered the prison yard, we had to perform gymnastic exercises for about twenty minutes, much to the enjoyment of the Poles and Ukrainians who were watching from across the street. (He was 57 years old at the time)

We were assigned work. My job was in the basement (of the prison) where we had to remove corpses from graves, and turn them over to others who would carry them on stretchers to the prison yard. By the time our work was half done, we were almost up to our knees in blood.

At intervals, the SS would come and fire at us. I just heard a bullet whiz by my head. When I turned around, I saw a guy next to me catch a bullet and drop to the ground, dead.

When night came, we had to assemble in the prison yard. We were marched into town to the old synagogue. The building, about 500 years old, had been burned down by the SS that day. One of the storm troopers came over to us and bragged: "Take a good look at your synagogue -- that's what we've done everywhere," then continued "everyone apart quickly or we'll shoot." The people ran apart quickly. He actually fired and several were hit.

I finally was allowed to go home. My wife was happy but in the next moment

she said, "You smell awful -- I can't take this." I told her how I had spent my last several days. What she smelled was the odor of death. That night she slept in an adjacent room.

The next morning I had to report back at the jail. We had been told the previous evening that for each man that failed to show up, ten would be killed.

Kathe and I had discussed this and we both decided that I would have to report. When I arrived, there were people already lined up. After the usual callisthenics, we had to run at top speed into the yard. In the corridor they had placed chairs for obstacles so that people would fall down. We were all in a panic since the SS kept beating the ones who fell down. That's where I lost my glasses. Finally I reached the yard and was again assigned to digging up bodies, this time in the yard.

One SS trooper was drunk and kept beating those poor people on their heads with a board.. Many fell bleeding to the ground. When the board broke, he picked up a shovel handle and the murder continued. In the meantime, I ran from one corner of the yard to another so that he would not catch me, but in my mind I said my good bye to those I loved -- my wife, my son. I knew that death was near.

Then, an SS man stood up on a small hill and yelled, "Who of you killed the German soldier?" When nobody confessed, he called out again. Next he wanted to know, "Which one of you speaks German?" I stepped forward since I hoped that this would lead to a softer assignment. He directed me to repeat the question. Again, everybody remained silent. He then told me that if he did not have a confession within two minutes, I would be shot. One can imagine my mental condition.

I kept calling out, of course without result. The trooper commanded me to come along. I complied, expecting a bullet in my back at any moment. When it did not come, I asked him what the guilty person looked like. The answer was "Immaterial." I suggested to him that I would look around. He told me to stay where I was. In the meantime I kept waiting for the bullet that never came. He

left and came back, and we returned to the work place. I mixed with the group and thus escaped another danger.

At night, we were taken to another yard and directed to face the wall while the SS were standing to one side with their guns ready to fire. Fortunately they left and we were permitted to turn around. We went back into formation and returned to town and home.

In the meantime, things at home went from bad to worse. Day and night we were harassed by soldiers. One pulled the gold wedding band from my wife's hand. Other Jewish citizens were beaten bloody on top of all the other indignities they had to suffer.

A Judenrat (council of elders) was formed, also a Jewish Militia. (This was a Jewish police force that was not permitted to carry weapons but was instructed to enforce all German orders to the Jews.) The upper echelon of the Nazis would give their orders to the Judenrat and they were expected to assure immediate compliance.

The first order was for a contribution of 1,200,000 Zlotys with a second payment of 60,000 Zlotys to follow two weeks later. A Star of David was to be placed over the door of every home that housed Jews.

Our food ration consisted of 1 pound of bread per person for eight days. Many starved to death. People were laying in the streets begging for food. From her own small ration, my wife Kathe often gave some to others.

Then, one day we were ordered to create a ghetto. From this point on, we were treated like prisoners and were not permitted outside the Ghetto without a special pass. Anyone disobeying who was caught by the police, would receive the death penalty. Poles and Ukrainians were expected to work but for Jews it was forced labor.

Raids followed. Many were locked up and shot the same day. Jews who worked, wore a white mark with a number on their left lower arm. If they were caught not working they would be sentenced to death.

The Ghetto also held a restaurant and pastry shop, but prices were out of reach for us. I started looking for work and found a job at the City Hospital.

One morning, the Ukrainians came looking for Jews to bury corpses at the cemetery. I went into hiding until the danger passed. Because of this I was immediately discharged from my job when I returned. The next morning I went to find another job and found one with an air force transport group. For wages I received food, fresh greens, bread.

(The invading armed forces actually consisted of two separate commands. The air force transport command as well as the Wehrmacht were part of the regular armed forces and not necessarily politically in agreement with the other politically "safe" units, the SS and the Gestapo. These latter were the two groups which instigated and committed the atrocities. When a Wehrmacht officer disagreed with these orders, it was politically expedient for him to follow them but often he didn't carry them out with the same conviction or veracity)

When I came home, Kathe was ecstatic and immediately started sharing the food with our relatives and neighbors. But, this came to an end after ten days when my new employers moved along. I was again unemployed.

Good fortune, however, prevailed. This time, the barracks were taken over by the the Ortskommandantur (German appointed town manager. Usually a Wehrmacht officer and often not politically motivated) and occupied by the Feldgendarmerie. (This military group was formed by Germany for home defense but later was sent to the front. It consisted of those too old or too young to qualify for regular service.). These were people in their fifties who showed some compassion for us. Since they were able to communicate with me, I was appointed building maintenance supervisor and controlled about twenty people. We were doing well again.

Early 1942, I learned that Jews would not be allowed to work directly for the Wehrmacht. The staff was discharged but I was able to keep working because of

my ability to speak German. I was returned under the jurisdiction of the Ortskommandantur and continued with my work. I had a good superior. A master sergeant with the Feldgendarmerie, a man named Ebel from Mecklenburg who felt sorry for us

The food situation was less than ideal. Several times, I tried to bring in a few items through the Ghetto gate, but was searched by the Ukrainian guards who confiscated them and fined me 10 Zlotys. I asked the guard to at least return a few things but he told me, "There is grass growing -- eat grass." For us who were able to work, a kitchen was opened so that we could have a warm meal at noon. I took my portion into the Ghetto to share with my wife, though it was not enough to fill us both.

Chapter 7

In spring 1942, the Nazis started a new campaign. About 4,000 Jews were shot. All orphanages and hospitals were emptied. Fortunately, we were still spared. The summer came slowly to an end but our hearts were heavy with sorrow. It appeared as if the Nazis meant to kill us all.

One day in summer '42, we received a letter from Cilly (Kathe's sister who lived in Berlin and was married to a Christian) asking us what we might need. My wife asked her for food and also begged her to send an American Dollar. In one of her letters we also received a few packs of saccharin and a couple of cigarettes.

One evening about 10:30 after we had gone to sleep, two officers of the Jewish Militia came and asked for Kathe Reichstein. It is easy to understand what state of mind we were in. I questioned them about why they wanted my wife, but they didn't know. Then I offered to go in her place. To no avail. We said our good byes and she left. Toward morning, I became restless. I fixed her a ham sandwich and took it to the Militia where she was under guard. I was allowed to speak to her through a barred window but she refused to eat.

Then I approached the contact man between the Jewish Militia and the police. He didn't know the reason for her imprisonment but told me that she was to have a hearing at 8 a.m. in front of the Gestapo.

The Ortskommandantur was across the street from the Gestapo building, so I busied myself in the yard in hopes of seeing what was going to happen. I was unable to see anything but coworkers advised me that she had been there and been returned to the Militia. This made me feel somewhat better, even though for the slightest perceived infringement they could have kept her in jail and shot her within weeks.

When I came home at noon, she was there waiting for me. Apparently, it was

all about her letter to Cilly and her request for the Dollar. A week later, Gestapo officers came to our apartment and made a search. They kept asking my wife, "Kathe, where do you have the Dollars? Give them to us already!" When they left, our place looked like it had been hit by an earthquake. Once again, things had turned out alright

I continuously pushed her to keep up her morale. But it didn't help much. From then on she became more and more depressed -- hardly spoke any more but continuously kept writing letters to Berlin. I once asked her, "Kathchen, what on earth do you write all the time?" But her only answer was, "Let me be."

I was still working for the Ortskommandantur. It was in July 1942, when one of my colleagues came to me and told me that some man had hung himself in the attic and his body was all bloated to the point where he could not be recognized. He suspected that it might be our coworker Hofman who had been discharged a few days ago because he had a game leg and was no longer productive. He had nothing to eat and might have committed suicide.

It was immediately reported to the Staff Sergeant and he passed the news along to the Sonderdienst. (Military police. Also known as SD.) Half an hour later, an SD official in civilian clothes ordered that four men climb to the attic and bring the body downstairs. When we arrived upstairs, he commanded me to climb a ladder and cut the body down. I told him that I could not do it. He yelled at me, "Either you do it or I'll take you in to the SD."

Well, I got a ladder and climbed up. The SD man then told me, "If he falls down and bursts open, it's going to be your skin." Four men and a straw mat were positioned below me in case he dropped. I had no scissors to cut him down with and they might not have done it anyhow since he had used a strong electric wire. I finally took two pieces of iron and kept hitting them against each other until the wire tore and the corpse fell on the mat. The men weren't fast enough and the body hit the floor pretty hard but fortunately didn't burst.

They carried the body to the yard and I had to search it for documents. It was Hofman alright. When the SD man saw that it was a Jew, he took off. Later on, Jews came from the Ghetto with a wagon and took him away.

Again, there was talk of an impending major campaign. August 1942 it happened. On August 31 at 4:30 in the morning, we heard terrible screaming on the outside and from our window, we viewed an awful sight. People were driven on to Laurel Square and those that didn't go voluntarily, were pushed or dragged -- small children, aged two to four ran around screaming. House doors and stores that were locked, were broken open by the Jewish Militia.

We quickly joined neighbors in the next apartment and discussed where we could hide. Suddenly, Militia men entered and commanded us to come along. With luck, it was Kallspen, one of my former coworkers from the days under Russian rule. We were lucky again. I told my wife to come on, we would hide in the bunker (A hole under the cellar floor) and then surely would find something else. I did not want to go without Kathe, but she talked me into going into hiding by myself. Ten minutes later, as I crouched in the bunker, I heard the sound of steps coming down from the stairs. This must have been the moment when the Militia took my wife.

The house became very quiet and I could hear the Militia search for more people. By two in the afternoon, the air in the bunker became unbearable. I crawled out, found some bread and then looked around the building. On the second floor I discovered one woman. She told me that on this morning everybody was taken from the house, including my wife. She suggested that the danger was great and I should continue to hide. So, back into the bunker I went. Soon I heard the Militia walk above my bunker and I heard one of them tell the other, "That's all there is."

That night, I came out of the bunker to get some bread and to look around. There was nobody present in the house and I went back into the bunker. At

midnight I heard a loud voice and realized that it was an occupant of the house. He came into the bunker and told me that he had hidden in the canal. Morning came and again we heard steps. It was Fisher, the neighbor at whose place both Kathe and I had met that previous morning.

From him I learned what had happened to my wife. She was loaded on a truck and taken to the railroad station for transport to the first crematorium -- the one in Belzen.

Chapter 8

For me, life became a burden. My beloved wife was taken from me. My eyes were full of tears and my tears did not dry. I was in my home, alone and lonely. I kept going to work but could not find peace. Most of our personnel had been imprisoned but because of the efforts of our bosses, the officers, they were released. The Ortskommandant came to an agreement with the Nazi leader to move us into barracks so that he would not lose any more workers.

One day, an order came down to evacuate the building immediately and take only the absolute essentials. Everything else was to be left behind. What did I care? I was picked up by a car from the Ortskommandantur and brought from the Ghetto to castle barracks. There we were quartered and fed. It was winter 1942 - 1943, a bitter cold one with much snow.

I had no shoes. They were all torn up, but I was given a pair of wooden shoes and everything was alright again. But we did not feel secure here, We were under direct command of the SS. And one day it happened. In January 1943 at 1 in the morning, a SS Hauptsturmfuehrer (Captain,) the former Ghetto commander came in, drunk, of course, accompanied by a trooper with a machine pistol. Going from bed to bed, he stuck a flashlight into our faces and gave a speech. He told us that if he ever came in and the room was not clean, we would stand attention in the yard for hours. It took a while for me to quiet down and for my heart to stop beating wildly.

In the barracks, there was a rumor that people over the age of fifty would be discharged and sent back to the Ghetto. My name was on that list.

In winter 1942-43, a truck pulled up in front of the Ortskommandantur. These were Gestapo agents who produced a list. I and several colleagues had to

get into a car and were taken to our new home, Concentration Camp Zagrobela. The start of a sad time for me -- a real hell. I started having thoughts of suicide since life had become unbearable. I witnessed daily shootings and hangings. For the next nine months I lived through the absolute worst of all times.

Several inmates thought that they would be willing to take the risk of trying to escape from the camp. I discussed the possibility with the most courageous of my comrades. It was early April 1943 during roll call, in the morning at 4 a.m., the two of us were able to run away. We separated immediately. I ran into the woods, hid in the underbrush and quickly removed all concentration camp identification as well as anything else that could give me away.

(These notes leave many questions unanswered. How were they able to get out of the camp? Were there no guards or guard dogs, electrified fences? I can only surmise that Concentration Camp Zagrobela was not one of the type of high security camps that were shown to us on the news reels. I do remember Papa telling us once that they climbed over a wall to escape)

Chapter 9

I kept myself alive by begging, while going south in direction of Romania. My compass was the Somme River. In daytime I walked, often through snow, and at night I slept in the fields. It was about 60 miles to the border and with an iron will I was determined to reach it.

It was the choice of life or death. But instead of feeling fear, I felt again like a human being since I rid myself of the KZ insignias, a yellow and red mark on my back and a number. Along the way, people questioned me from where I came and my destination. Somehow I must have had the correct answers because I kept advancing from village to village, Berezawice, Mikolintza, Terebovla, Padhajce, Czortkow, Tliste, Zaleszyki. Here I reached a broad river, the Dniester, the border between Poland and Romania.

I stood at the riverbank and considered the best way to get across. It was time to question someone local -- very carefully since the slightest suspicion could have cost me my life. Slowly I kept asking if it was possible to get into Romania but was advised against trying it. Anyone caught would be locked up and returned back across the border to the Germans.

They suggested that I go to the employment office and try to find any type of work in that town of Zaleszyki (the border crossing between Poland and Romania, pop. 4,000+) I decided that my only hope lay in acting determined and explained to the Ukrainian official that I came from the German enclave in Czortkow, Russia. My documents had been stolen or were lost during the long railroad trip. They believed me and supplied me with a voucher to receive dinner, lodging and breakfast in the German commissary. I also was given 7 Zlotys so that

I could continue my trip to the Kreishauptmanschaft (town manager) in Czortkow in order to have my documents replaced

My decision was to approach the highest local official available to see what kind of documentation I could get. It turned out to be the Kreishauptman. When I arrived at the Town Hall, I learned from his secretary that he was out of town. I had to go to Czortkow (pop. 18,000+) anyway. By this time it was getting dark. She gave me a slip for food and lodging at the commissary and again 7 Zloty for the trip. The next morning I went to Czortkow. The official was out but his assistant was expected at noon. I waited around but nobody showed up.

After thinking it over, I decided to bring my problems to the highest official present, approached a Landwirtschaftsinspector (Inspector for Commerce and Agriculture) and told him what I wanted. He asked the reason for my excellent command of the German language. I explained to him that at home we only spoke German. My father was born in a small village near Bremen and emigrated to Russia when he was sixteen years old. He settled in Czortkow. My mother was born in the ethnic German enclave in Czortkow. He believed my statement and handed me a voucher for two days rations.

That afternoon I went to the employment office. It was a difficult situation since I was unable to produce any documents. After a lengthy question-and-answer session, they decided to send me to a camp for displaced German nationals who had had been evacuated from Russia. I marched on to the camp about 1 mile from the center of the city. It was a huge place holding about 5,000 people. Since I was unable to communicate with most of them, I went to the camp commander, a civilian in his 40s with a swastika on his jacket.

I told him that the employment office had called ahead and repeated my story. He voiced agreement but demanded documents. Fortunately, he was willing to believe me and after much hesitation decided to accept me in camp.

Now, I had to supply my background information. I gave my name as Franz

Richter. My mother was Anna Zlenka, born in the German colony in Czortkow. Once admitted, everything went well. Since I was the only inmate in the camp who was able to read and write German, the camp commander, an SS Sturmfuerer (Lieutenant) from Vienna by the name of Boehm, appointed me to be his right hand man.

My work consisted of giving out the work assignments and making sure that the camp was kept clean. Even in this camp I was in constant fear since the distance to Tarnopol was only 35 miles. The Command Center Czortkow was governed by the Command Center in Tarnopol. We received constant visits from them.

One day, the Quartermaster, a Captain and his Staff Sergeant came from Tarnopol to requisition space for an arriving Wehrmacht contingent. Since the camp commander was out of town, they looked for me to give them the required information. With my good luck, I recognized the Sergeant from Tarnopol before he spotted me. They left without ever finding me. Since I lived in constant fear, I tried to stay out of sight as much as possible.

Another time, one of the camp inmates called me a fraud. This charge excited me terribly and I had to take fast action to nip these allegations in the bud. I immediately reported the incident to the camp commander. The inmate was a giant, standing at least 6 feet tall and looked very powerful as we stood in front of the commander. He was asked why he had called me by that name but, of course, he had no proof against me. He was dressed down by the commander and told never to use this word against me again. So, things went well again.

After I was here for six months, the camp was divided into two sections, one was assigned to Tarnopol, the other to Drohobycz. I ended up in the latter. After two days, I was put by the camp commander, an Unterschaarfuerer (Lieutenant) from Cologne, in charge of Jewish property. This consisted mostly of items confiscated from murdered Jews like clothing, bed linen, household articles, even 14 Toras which I was able to rescue by sending them to Hungary with members of the Wehrmacht. (He never explained to me how he accomplished that feat) The

household articles I had to turn over to Germans in the camp and, upon receipt, to the SS.

After three months, this camp again was dissolved and I ended up in Konitz, West Prussia. (35 miles south of Szczecin in the extreme north already near the German border). I reported to a farmer for agricultural work. The work became too difficult for me (he was 60 years old at the time) so that I had to quit after six weeks. Besides, I suffered terribly from rheumatism and had to consult a doctor. The German military doctor examined me and told me to go to bed for four days and take four aspirin three times a day, 12 aspirins daily. After the first nine aspirins, I became so violently ill that I stopped taking them. Besides, I somehow had the feeling that was trying to do away with me. I ended that treatment.

After I felt better, I was assigned to a wholesale firm that warehoused groceries. This job lasted until October 1943.

At the same time, I received orders to report for military service. I was examined by a doctor and accepted for Landsturm 2, but never was called up.

In October 1943, Camp Konitz had to be evacuated to make room for the Wehrmacht. I ended up with a small group in a convent with a church. It was in the village Banstetten, 12 km from Konitz. The village was an agricultural estate and consisted of about twenty houses. The natives had to work on the estate. Our people also were employed there. I was the librarian. The library held books and magazines, naturally all Nazi literature.

Chapter 10

Sam -- 1944 - 1946

This is where Papa's written report ends. We tried to dissuade him from reliving those dark days. Actually, soon history took a more positive turn and after a while, he acted less emotional when we talked about those dark days..

After the German defeat at Stalingrad, the Nazis started retreating and soon it became a free for all as to who could run away faster. Everybody was out to save their own skin and the group which had worked on the estate in Banstetten was left to its own devices. As the Russians overran the area, my father was hidden by the nuns in the convent.

One of the first actions by the Russians was to lock up all German sympathizers, give them a hearing in front of an NKVD court and then take quick retribution. Mostly this meant execution. My father was accused by a former member of his group as being a German sympathizer. Fortunately, he was able to convince the court of his real background. Now, instead of being executed, he was drafted as an interpreter by the same Russian court to which he had been denounced. In his words, he got a certain amount of revenge and satisfaction from seeing his former tormentors punished.

His objective still was, to find a way to come to America. This meant,

getting into the American military zone. There was just one problem. The Russians would not let him go..

One day, he just walked away and was able to work his way into the British zone, where he received help and was transported back to Hanover. I have seen photos and models of Hanover after the war. The city had been 95% destroyed. Surprisingly, the house we had lived in was never touched in the bombing raids. He told me that he met the house superintendent of the building, Herr Weber, who had already lived there during our days in Hanover. Like all "good" Germans, he condemned the atrocities against the Jews and offered to let Papa stay in his apartment as long as he liked. My father took advantage of the offer and to his surprise found some pieces of furniture from our own home, including the chair I had built for my examination to become a journeyman. Weber offered to return them, but my father had no use for them.

After they had arrived in the camp in Zbaszyn, Mama had written to her brother Max in Berlin asking him to take a train to Hanover and to see if he could salvage any of our property. When Max arrived in Hanover, he learned that all our possessions were to be sold in order to "defray the cost of my parents' transportation to Poland." Anything left over was attached by the landlord for rental payments. He was able to get his hands on a few personal items and several photographs which he forwarded on to Zbaszyn, but that was all.

Papa rested in Hanover for a short while and then continued his trip to the American zone.

Arriving in the American zone, he contacted the authorities for help. He was assigned to the UNRRA Team 521, which was stationed in Lampertheim, in the state of Hessa. UNRRA is an acronym for United Nations Relief and Refugee Association, a forerunner organization of the United Nations.

Sam apparently ingratiated himself with the group's American director, a Mrs. Mathilda Oftedal. He was appointed postmaster for the camp that held

thousands of displaced persons. In a letter he mailed to her from Philadelphia, he writes: "I myself will never forget you for your fair treatment. You were not only our director but more like a mother who at times had to scold her children."

Now, his next objective was to find his son, somewhere in the big city of Philadelphia. But at least, now there was help since one function of UNRRA was to place their charges back into a normal environment.

СССР

КОМИТЕТ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ
ГОСБЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

3-е УПРАВЛЕНИЕ
ТРАНСПОРТНЫЙ ОТДЕЛ — 5

КОМУ РАЙХСГАЙН В.У.

С получением этого прошения не отговаривать в

г. Росийск и Росийскую-провинцию - г. Бидго

для выполнения служебных заданий

С.И. Комаринов 25-й, с 6-го июля по 31-го

1945 г. со отпуском не вносить.

ПОДПИСЬ: *Рассмотрение не требуется*



С.И. Комаринов

*Если вырешит
ехать по восточной
и трассе по
не суживать
дел. по с. 13/10
14/15-45*

Travel Permit for Russian Zone of Occupation

Nur zum Gebrauch bei Behörden Ihres Bestimmungsortes.

9. Ausgegebene Lebensmittelkarten: _____

10. Wohnungsanschrift: _____

Hierunter nur für Britische Behörde.

11. Bestimmungsort: _____

Hanover

Front

Flüchtlingen

Registrierungskarte FRIEDLAND

Karte Nr. 5668

1. Name: REICHSTEIN SANSON

2. Geschlecht: m

3. Staatsangehörigkeit: Staatloses

4. Alter: 61.

5. Von wo: Konitz/Wolpe

6. Beruf: KUHLEMAN

7. Ärztlich untersucht

a) Krankheit: _____

8a) Religion: jüde

b) Überwiesen: _____

b) Durchgang: 20-10-45

8. Desinfiziert: 20. 10. 45. m

c) gepflegt bis: 31/11

N. B.: Diese Karte soll bis zu Ihrer nächsten Verfügung in Ihrem Besitz bleiben.

Reverse

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION

UNRRA
Team 521, APO 757
U. S. Army

Tlph. Mannheim civ. 339
milit. 40046

Lampertheim (Hessen)

8th June 1946.

This is to certify that Mr. Samson Reichstein
DP Go5776193 has been a member of our camp
for the past 6 months and during that time he
filled the position of

Post Office Chief.

He carried out his duties very conscientiously
and we always found him extremely helpful to all
the people to whom he rendered services in this
capacity.

Director.
UNRRA 521

Mathilde Oftedal
Mathilde Oftedal

UNRRA Team 521
(16) Lampertheim/Hessen
APO 757, c/o Postmaster
New York, N.Y.

Chapter 11

Herbert 1938 - 1946

I arrived in New York City on Oct. 27. 1938. Two of my sponsors who signed the affidavit that allowed me to come to this country were a Mr. and Mrs. Harry Eising of New York City, very distant relatives. He was a vice president with one of the major New York banks. Mrs. Eising picked me up at the pier in a chauffeur-driven limousine. Then she had us taken to a center city Woolworth. While the driver kept cruising around the block, she bought me an ice cream soda, telling me that this was a real American specialty, popular with teenagers. She wanted me always to remember that she was the one who gave me my first treat in this new country. I met Mrs. Eising one more time, when I got married, on took my new bride on our honeymoon to New York. We called on her to pay our respects. After that, we lost touch with each other.

They drove me to Penn Station and I went on to Philadelphia to live with my uncle and aunt, Adolf and Sophie Rosenbaum, who had preceded me to this country by three months. She was my mother's sister and even though they hardly had enough to make ends meet, they greeted me with open arms. My cousin Edith was still in high school and my cousin Kurt, the only breadwinner in the family, worked for Lit Brothers as a stockroom clerk. I was treated like a member of the family, to the great relief of my mother who was worried that harm may come to her little boy in the great wide world.

Fortunately I found work within a week, as a night watchman in a scrap iron

yard, Abrams Metal Company at 58th & Woodland Avenue. The job required me to stay at this yard from the time it closed at 6 p.m. until 7 the next morning when the first laborers showed up for work. Long hours but for me the pay was good, \$15 a week. That was double of what most newcomers were offered at the time.

I was given a pistol and a watch dog. All I was required to do, was to walk across the yard and punch a clock that was directly connected to a civilian guard firm. If I missed my hourly check-in, they would call and if I failed to answer the phone, they would send two men in a car.

On my first night on the job, somebody banged on the gate until I walked outside to find out what the problem was. It turned out to be a big black fellow, about 6½ feet tall. He claimed that he had just hitchhiked in from South Carolina. He was promised a job in the yard once he arrived here. Would I allow him to sit down inside and sleep. Inexperienced as I was, I agreed. Next, he asked if I would mind writing a letter to his wife to let her know that he had safely arrived. There, the preacher would read it to her. This type of illiteracy was new to me but I was glad to accommodate him. His name was Heavy Williams. We became good friends and we worked side by side for two years. The yard had about 60 black employees and two whites. Within six months, I had acquired a southern accent. I also learned about racial prejudice in this country. It wasn't pretty but at least, it wasn't government sponsored

Two days after my arrival in the country, the first newspaper reports came out about the Nazi action against Polish Jews in Germany. I was too new in the country to read the papers and my relatives decided to keep the news from me until they found out what had happened to my parents.

My routine was, to come home at about 8 in the morning, eat breakfast and go to sleep. On the second morning, my aunt woke me to tell that a letter had arrived from my aunt Cilly, in Berlin, who had heard from my parents -- now in camp in Zbaszyn. From my first paycheck, I mailed \$5 to my parents. From my weekly pay, I

turned over \$7.50 to my aunt toward household expenses. My carfare was 75¢ per week and \$5 went into a savings account. Once a month, my cousin Kurt would go to a Polish agency and have \$15 transferred to my parents. As Mama wrote, they received between 80 - 90 Zlotys, which "allowed them to live like Kings." Either way, it helped toward extra food and allowed them to rent a warm apartment. We had to stop these subsidies when the war started and my last money order was returned a few months later.

We still received mail from them while they lived under Russian rule, but all communication stopped once the Germans took over Tarnopol. On December 7, 1941, the United States entered the war. News from Eastern Europe turned from bad to worse. Then came rumors of atrocities, but actually, we never received confirmation of the real state of the holocaust until the Allied armies freed the concentration camps and we saw news reels and heard eye witness reports. Soon we gave up all hope of ever seeing my parents again.

My work in the scrap iron yard continued until October 1941, for six months as a watchman and then I was "promoted" to laborer. In spite of the fact that I had a reasonable working knowledge of the English language, I continued my studies by going to evening school. With the armaments industry cranking up to supply the Allies, it was becoming easier to get work. I took a job in a service station for Kirschner Brothers, a young and coming partnership. I stayed with that company through various promotions for 46 years until I retired as manager of their lubricants division.

In 1943 I became a U.S. citizen, fulfilling one of the hopes of my lifetime. At that time, I also officially changed my name from Reichstein to Ert. By 1946, I had worked myself up to manager of one of the company's major outlets and had married my wife, Lore Steinhardt, a pretty little girl with a similar background to mine, except she was fortunate in that she came to this country with her parents.

One morning in the spring of 1946, Lore called me at work. She had just been contacted by HIAS, a Jewish relief organization. They wanted to know if I was the Herbert Reichstein who was born in Hanover. In that case ~~there~~ was news for me. Apparently they had trouble tracking me down because of the name change. From them we learned that my father was still alive.

It took about three months before we were notified that he was on his way and would land in three days. We had a small two room apartment but, naturally, he would stay with us, at least in the beginning. I went right out and bought a surplus army cot which we placed in our living room/dining room area and found a small cabinet for whatever belongings he might have.

Chapter 12

Sam -- 1946 - 1955

The great day arrived. Lore and I put on our best clothes and we both went to New York, anxiously waiting at the gangplank, I finally spotted him. A little old man with a heavy winter coat about two sizes too large, perspiring in the 85° summer temperature. In one hand he carried a cardboard suitcase, in the other a cardboard box tied together with strings -- all he owned in this world. He may have felt uncomfortable but I will never forget the sheer joy on his face when he recognized me. In the taxi on the way to Penn Station, he not only got acquainted with his new daughter-in-law but learned that before long, he was going to be a grandfather.

Papa stayed with us until February when Eileen was born. Then he moved into a small room nearby but still took most of his meals with us.

With help from Jewish aid organizations, he found his first job. Kitchen assistant at the Wood School in Langhorne. Quite a comedown from a man with his background, but he had a room, received his meals and a small salary. Once a week on his day off, he came in by bus to visit us. Then, at age 63, he started to learn English.

One of the high points of his week was a visit to the gas station where I worked. It impressed him immensely that his son had become a boss. He became a popular sight around the place and several of my customers just stopped by to talk to him. A few years later, when I received my promotion to supervisor, had my own car and drove around to visit service stations all day, his happiness found no bounds. "If only your mother could have seen this," he would say over and over again.

1949



Sam as the proud grandfather
with Eileen

After several years at the Wood School, he found himself a job closer to my house, at the Friends School on Roosevelt Boulevard. The same type of work.

By 1953, he started complaining about his health and apparently, the work was getting to be too much for him. After checking around, I was able to have him admitted into the Uptown Home for the Aged, then located on Marshall Street near Girard Avenue. We still got together at least once a week. Either I picked him up or he came by trolley car.

Then, one day I got a call that Papa had a heart attack and was taken to the Philadelphia General Hospital. One of the sponsors from the Uptown Home used to come over there, pick up several volunteers and drive them to the Jewish cemetery to say the kadish, the prayer for the dead on the anniversary of their death. He had his first heart attack while saying the prayer.

I visited him at the hospital whenever I could. He appeared to be recuperating. Even in his death, there was controversy as there had been during his whole life. On Papa's birthday, March 24, I came down carrying flowers, new pajamas and a few other gifts. I found his bed empty. Nobody would tell me where he had been moved to. Finally, the nurse called a young intern who gave me the bad news. They had forgotten to notify the family. He died on his seventy-first birthday.

His stone on Montefiore Cemetery has his dates of birth and death under his name, but beneath that, it reads, In Memory of My Mother, Kathe Reichstein, 1882 - 1942. In death, they are both together again.



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